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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on the teaching of reflective thinking skills to a cross-cultural class of school of education students. The paper relates the cultural constraints and cross-cultural responses brought to light by the process of instruction and by the reaction of students to a course on the Holocaust. The goal of Multicultural Education is to focus not only on cultural differences but also on human condition universals. However, this must be done in a way that evokes reflection about oneself, others, and the contradictions encompassed in historical and contemporary culture. The Holocaust, by providing innumerable episodes which defy predictable assumptions of behavior and thought and by illustrating our human vulnerabilities, challenges our notions of what is possible and reinforces our identification with our common humanity. However, the teaching of reflective thinking skills cross-culturally must include a framework which will allow for the questioning of the universality of all information that is conveyed. The danger lies in assuming a priori, without questioning, that the content and methodology to be taught is universal. (JD)

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TEACHING REFLECTIVE THINKING
CULTURAL CONSTRAINTS
AND CROSS CULTURAL RESPONSES

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The purpose of this paper is to report on the teaching of reflective thinking skills to a cross-cultural class of school of education students. More specifically, the paper will relate the cultural constraints and cross-cultural responses brought to light by the process of instruction and by the reaction of the students to a course on the Holocaust. The course content and materials focused on the historical events before, during and after the systematic genocide of Jews in World War II (1933- 1945). The cultural issues which surfaced during the course need to be considered in the teaching of reflective thinking.

The course was taught under the rubric of "Multicultural Education Curriculum Development." The materials, format and methodology were based on Facing History and Ourselves curriculum (M. Strom and W. Parsons, 1982). Therefore, before examining the cultural issues raised during the course, it is necessary to briefly describe the philosophy and objectives of both multiculturalism and the curriculum used in the course. As will be seen, both are closely linked by the theme

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of reflective thinking.

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An important premise of multicultural education is that the reduction of interpersonal and intercultural conflict is based primarily on the critical and reflective understanding of self and others in historical, cultural and contemporary contexts. Similarly, better communication with others is not only based on awareness of differences. It encompasses, as well, the internalization of human condition universals. Thus, in addition to learning about cultural differences, it is important to explore what binds us with people who conceive of their realities differently (Wurzel, 1984).

However, the reduction of cultural conflict and the enhancement of intercultural communication is not, simply, the learning of cultural differences and similarities. It necessitates the development of a broader and more expandable style of thinking. It involves the acquisition of a new mind set. That is, a style of mental and emotional consciousness that allows individuals to negotiate, more readily, new formations of reality. It involves the development of individuals who are more susceptible to change and to the acceptance of the inevitability of the conflict that comes with it.

Multiculturalism is the development of humility towards the nature of knowledge. This entails internalizing the historical and contemporary contradictions that are embedded in the human condition. One may say that such a style of

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thinking and feeling, which is tolerant of the ambiguities of knowledge, will also be more open to variation and equally tolerant of cultural differences. Thus, multiculturalism is the attainment of a reflective style of thinking which encourages the rejection of simple answers and fosters understanding of the significance of any question.

Multiculturalism is the opposite of dogmatism. For, it teaches us to accept as inevitable the contradictions implicit in everything we learn. Thus, a multicultural perspective is one which strives towards learning about ourselves as we attempt to comprehend the realities of others. Through this process we also learn to tolerate the uncertainty of knowledge. Aldous Huxley (1926) upon his return from his first trip around the world, illustrates this point:

So the journey is over and I am back again, richer by much experience and poorer by many exploded convictions, many perished certainties. For convictions and certainties are too often the concomitants of ignorance....I set out on my travels knowing, or thinking I knew, how men should live, be governed, be educated, what they should believe. I had my views on every activity of life. Now, on my return, I find myself without any of these pleasing certainties....The better you understand the significance of any question, the more difficult it becomes to answer it. Those who attach a high importance to their own opinion should stay at home. When one is traveling, convictions are mislaid as easily as spectacles, but unlike spectacles, they are not easily replaced (N.Y.T.p3).

Multiculturalism is a style of self awareness which involves frequent questioning about the expandable and arbitrary nature of one's own culture. If we are frequently conscious that cultural context influences our thoughts and behaviors

and that these, while important to us, are neither static nor absolute entities, we will be more open to accept the fact, that others can enrich our experience. Thus to be multicultural is to be aware and able to incorporate and synthesize different systems of cultural knowledge into one's own. Adler (1974), further illustrates this:

Multicultural man is the person who is intellectually and emotionally committed to the fundamental unity of all human beings while at the same time he recognizes, legitimizes, accepts, and appreciates the fundamental differences that lie between people from different cultures. This new kind of man cannot be defined by the languages he speaks, the countries he has visited, or the number of international contacts he has made. Nor is he defined by his profession, his place of residence, or his cognitive sophistication. Instead, multicultural man is recognized by the configuration of his outlooks and world views, by the way he remains open to the imminence of experience (p23-24).

In summary, the goal of Multicultural Education is to focus not only on cultural differences but also on human condition universals. However, this must be done in a way that evokes reflection about oneself, others, and the contradictions encompassed in historical and contemporary culture.

The Holocaust, by providing innumerable episodes which defy predictable assumptions of behavior and thought and by illustrating our human vulnerabilities, challenges our notions of what is possible and reinforces our identification with our common humanity.

The Facing History Curriculum, in its methodology, its presentation and organization of content and material, allows for the applicability of the objectives of multicultural

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education. While it had originally been conceived for junior high school and high school students, its content can be adapted to a higher education. Its main goal is to promote reflective thinking. The authors (Strom and Parsons, 1982 p13) trace their own philosophy to Hannah Arendt's important question. She asks: "Could the activity of thinking, as such,... be among the conditions that make men abstain from evil-doing or even actually condition them against it?" (1972).

Consequently the curriculum is designed to make students think. They are asked not merely to take what they see and hear, but to make connections, question the information they receive, process it and reflect on their answers. Its pedagogical goals: to allow students to move thinking from simple to complex, to generate conflict, to foster a sense of community in the classroom and to help students draw connections to their own lives correspond closely to the aims of promoting a multicultural style of thinking.

The curriculum underlies the significance of the individual in controlling his/her destiny and that of the society at large. Strom & Parsons (1982) illustrate this in their introduction:

In this curriculum, students investigate the use and abuse of power, obedience, loyalty, decision-making, and survival as they further develop the notions of justice. They identify the role and responsibilities of the individual within a given society in times of choice....They study this history to learn that this event was not inevitable." (p13)

Facing History and Ourselves is more than a curriculum it is

a teacher training and resource organization which makes available films, materials, Holocaust witnesses and survivors. Perhaps more importantly, they provide the teacher the constant support needed to help others also deal with difficult emotionally laden material. For this I am extremely thankful.

Teaching this course entails helping students listen to each other and to build frameworks with which to interpret potentially puzzling and disturbing information. The inquiry model, which is based on the teacher acting as a facilitator of discussion and clarifier of ideas, is central to the course. Thinking and reflecting is encouraged by allowing students to freely express their ideas verbally and in writing, through individual journals which were seen periodically by the teacher.

This particular course was taught within the framework of multicultural issues. Consequently the Facing History program was adapted to fit this framework. In a period of twelve weeks the course dealt with the following themes: a) The role of the individual in society, b) cultural assumptions about knowledge, c) obedience and resistance to cultural norms, d) education in Nazi Germany, e) the Holocaust. Given the cross cultural composition of the course, students related the material to their own experiences. In addition to the curriculum students were given other materials which focused on cultural differences, and cultural pluralism. For an

assignment, in addition to their journals, students individually or in groups had to develop, using facing history as a model, a curriculum dealing with the history of a particular racial or ethnic group.

Eighteen students participated in the course. Eight of them were international students [Japan(2), Indonesia, Taiwan (2), Israel, Mexico, Ecuador]. Out of eighteen students six of them were undergraduates, the rest were graduate students. I was responsible for the teaching and coordination of the course.

The analysis of the process of instruction and the reaction of the students were based on a) notes which I took after each session, b) the students' journals, c) interviews with each student during and after the course was completed. The interpretation of information was organized into two parts. The first deals with the constrictions of the culture of the school in dealing with the subject of genocide. The second section deals with the culturally based responses of the students to the material.

Cultural Constraints:

In this section I would like to focus on one major constraint of the culture of schooling observed through the process of instruction and the responses of the students. The culture of the school deters genuine reflective thinking by depersonalizing knowledge and human relations. It will also

be seen how the teaching of the Holocaust challenges this constraint. The sharing of emotions creates a strong sense of community. Thus it creates a more conducive forum for genuine reflection.

There was some confusion and uneasiness as I introduced the course. Students looked at each other, as if to ask: "What does Multicultural Education have to do with the Holocaust? . I talked about Multiculturalism; its relation to human condition issues. I continued to sense discomfort. Yet, it was never verbalized.

In terms of required assignments, I told them that they had a choice. They could develop a curriculum on their own or they could do it with other members. There were a lot of questions about grading a collective work; the impossibility of finding time outside the classroom to get together and other practical issues. Similarly, I told them about journals. Their purpose, I said, was to reflect on the class discussion, materials, and to express their personal feelings on these issues. After three sessions, in response to a question, I reasserted that collective work did not mean division of labor, but the sharing of all aspects of the project. Complaints about grading and practical issues continued. At the time most people were leaning towards doing their work individually.

From the initial responses what appeared is that students,

conditioned by the culture of the school, did not know how to react to what they were about to learn. The first entries in the journals express confusion as to what genocide has to do with Multicultural curriculum development. With two exceptions there was no demonstration of discomfort with the subject. I wrote at the time: " I expected confusion. However, I also expected more expressions of fear and discomfort. I know they must feel this. Overall, students appeared to say what they want me to hear" : The following is such an example: "I am eager to learn about curriculum development and understand more about other cultures".

As the weeks went on and the material was emotionally provocative, the responses were very intellectualized. Personal feelings were seldom acknowledged. At the time I wrote: "There is no expression of their emotions. The power of cultural conditioning is clear. Emotions had to remain outside of the realm of school. They had never before been expected to write about them in the classroom."

Early in the course one incident stood out in my mind. We had just finished watching a fifteen minute film : "Joseph Schultz". In it, a young German soldier refuses the order to execute a group of resistance fighters. Thus, he is ordered by his superior officer to join the partisans who are standing eyes bound against the wall. The young soldier slowly takes off his identification belt, gives up his weapons and joins those to be killed. The question remains:

would the other soldiers, his friends, shoot. They did.

As the film ended there was silence. I noticed tears on some students' faces. I also felt very touched. I purposely remained silent. Some one asked for a break. A few minutes later, we were talking about responsibility, obedience, and the potential use of the film with children. Our feelings were slightly acknowledged only after I pressed the issue.

One of the students wrote in her journal:

The Joseph Schultz movie got me very upset; it brought tears to my eyes. It made me feel faint. But, the intellectualization of it really got to me. We can be so cold about every thing. Sharing our feelings openly was too hard.

Those feelings have to be dealt with, we cannot just discuss actions analytically and forget our tears.

Jules Henry, in his Cross-Cultural Outline of Education (1960) states that in order to study the culture of schooling, one needs not to look at what is taught, but more importantly, at what is not taught. None of the students in the course had ever been exposed to any such material in their prior education. Most of the International students, specially those from the Far East, were not acquainted with the Holocaust. In her journal one of them who exemplified others, wrote: " I didn't know anything about the Holocaust. I realized then how little I knew about anything." American students had had very little exposure to it in history or social studies. When it was taught it was mentioned as a fact and as an extraneous event to World War II. Interestingly enough an American undergraduate paralleled the international

student's statement: " As I studied this I realized how little I actually did know about the Holocaust and about a lot of other subjects. I had never been exposed to this in my previous education. It made me wonder what I had actually learned".

What emerges from this, and the previous discussion on the initial responses of students to the course, is that by not generally teaching uncomfortable subjects such as genocide, and by not encouraging the sharing of emotions, schooling colludes in the depersonalization of self and of knowledge. Schooling reinforces the denial of our common vulnerabilities, and the rejection of the notion that emotion is closely tied to learning and knowing. By indirectly doing this schools do not allow students to share in each others' humanity. In contrast, communication between them and between teacher and students, is based on depersonalized barriers, and on competition and external achievement.

Thus the following questions are raised: If students are not reinforced to share in each others' feelings can they really share in each others' thoughts? When they express their thoughts in class, do they really listen to each other or is it part of the schooling game? Do they just say and write what the teacher wants to hear? Is their motivation to learn and think only external?(grades and degrees).

Half way through the course a change was slowly taking place. The turning point was the visit of a survivor of the

Holocaust. She vividly related her pain and the emotion that we together felt uncovered our shared humanity and strongly united the class. Terrence Des Pres (1976) illustrates the same sharing of humanity as he describes the responses of the students he taught:

And for all their shock and depression and yes, also their tears, what emerges finally are things so finely human, things so clearly good and life enhancing, that the danger we run and the damage we share in meditation on the Holocaust seem not too high a price to pay.

From that moment on the bond that had been created among all class members was very unique. A student wrote: "I felt a lot closer to the members of our class when we finally discussed things openly. It was very special to me." This feeling of togetherness served as a catalizer of learning and thinking energy. Soon after people were doing their assignments in groups. Working and learning together outside class, on weekends and evenings.

This process demonstrated to me how constraining to education is not to openly acknowledge emotion as an intrinsic element in learning and thinking. By not dealing with the uncomfortable and the feelings we hold in the classroom we perpetuate dehumanization outside of it. By dealing with it we enhance our feelings for others and end up also benefiting cognitively.

A student, who also exemplified the writing of others stated

in her journal:

"When I started this course I thought it was going to be one more course of many. Now that is almost over I know that I will never forget what I learned."

CROSS CULTURAL RESPONSES:

This section will examine some of the cultural bound responses from the students. This will be done in order to discuss the appropriateness of the transference of this kind of reflective thinking teaching materials to other cultures. The following themes were selected: Verbal Output vs. Silence, Confrontation vs. Harmony, Individual vs. Collective Responsibility.

Verbal Output vs. Silence: Students from the far east and Indonesia expressed in the journals the difficulty of participating in a course which emphasized discussion. This skill is not emphasized in their education. To the point that this kind of outward expression of behavior is, traditionally not accepted. One of the Japanese students, who struggled with this new approach, writes in her journal: " In my country we do not participate in open discussions. There is a saying which we must abide by: "A nail that sticks out must be hammered down." "It was very hard for me to participate in class."

The propensity to link verbal output with positive

individual qualities, such as intelligence, strong reflective skills, leadership qualities is a Western notion. Silence, on the contrary is perceived as demonstration of shyness and lack of reflective skills. Similarly, this is related to the need of Westerners, and perhaps, more extremely, North Americans, to assert one's individuality by expressing an opinion. At times the need to verbalize is more important than the content of the statement.

The need to verbalize can also be linked with the orientation of Westerners and North Americans towards actions that are concrete and measurable. Strong meaning is attached to "doing", specially if it brings about visible and measurable actions. The opposite is the propensity for the less visible and therefore, less measurable. Thus one extreme expresses preference for active behavior the other emphasizes a more contemplating orientation towards activity.

Confrontation vs. Harmony:

In my observations I noticed that most of the discussion was carried by American students with some participation of the Latin Americans. The Asian group participated only when asked, or when they felt the need. However, their participation was never argumentative. They never openly expressed disagreement with others. In contrast, at times, the class discussion among North Americans had strong competitive connotations.

In addition to issues of assertion of individuality, the silence of the Asian students can be linked to their propensity to seek harmony rather than confrontation. While disagreement is often perceived, by Americans, as a healthy endeavor towards finding the "truth", Asians, will seldom confront others. A Japanese student wrote: "I am not used to expressing disagreement in the classroom. I was always taught to agree with an opinion in public even if I did not like it in my heart". Kerlinger (1951), states, that in Japan it is offensive for an individual to urge the acceptance of his opinion as a course of action. The individual must use circumlocution and maintain a rather strict reserve. Scholars refer to the tendency to avoid confrontation as the need to save face (Stewart 1974, Nakane 1970,). Steinberg comments on this issue as follows:

One Western concept that has never really functioned in Japan, although written into constitution and law, is the idea of majority rule. The Confucian ethic, which still governs Japan, demands unanimity, and in order to respect the "rights of the minority" the majority will compromise on almost every issue until a consensus of some kind is reached. This principle applies not only to government, but to business boardrooms, union halls, association meetings and family councils. No one must ever be completely defeated, because if he is, he cannot "hold up his face." (1964)

The spirit of confrontation runs parallel to competition, which in turn runs contrary to the harmony traditionally sought by the Japanese. This raises some questions of the cultural transferability of the notion that sees critical

thinking as the ability to argue and to openly confront opposing ideas.

Individual Responsibility vs. Collective Responsibility:

One essential aspect of the course was to deal with issues of individual responsibility. The course asked students to examine the issue of individual responsibility from a historical and contemporary perspective. By studying the role and responsibility of the bystander in Nazi Germany one also examines the bystander in contemporary times. Yet this notion demands the assumption that responsibility for one's actions lies on the individual. Stewart(1974)states on this issue:

The American locus of decision-making in the individual is paralleled by the insistence that motivation should also arise within him. Responsibility for decision and action devolve on the individual...Overseas, where the locus of decision-making is not on the individual, the question of responsibility is relatively meaningless. Responsibility is likely to be delocalized in cultures where the people have strong ties to their immediate family or community and reach decisions by consensus. (p34).

The comments of the Asian students reinforced the above view. One must have trust in others who are wiser to make some of our decisions." Similarly ,American students in the class expressed a great deal of surprise to the Asian students' notion that obedience to others is a positive value. If you trust others, the Asian students said: "

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obedience or total loyalty is a virtue." Asians, traditionally, place decision making and responsibility not on the individual but on the group. Since harmony and trust are pervasive values in interaction, obedience and the delegation of individual responsibility may not be seen as an issue.

The Western and North American Ethos stresses that the individual can make a difference. He can by his own effort resolve any problem that confronts him. The opposite is expressed by a Chinese student in her journal: "The Chinese people believe that wisdom is pulled together by the people, thus we have the proverb: Three shoe menders are wiser than one scholar".

Another related issue that was brought up by almost all international students refers to the difficulty of implementing curricula of this sort in societies with strong authoritarian traditions. "You talk about choice, about citizen's responsibility. All those concepts are irrelevant in my country. If I do not do what I am told I am punished".

As the course was near its end and the cross cultural issues continued to surface, I began to question whether these had been imposed upon the international students. I questioned whether it was fair to impose a Western and American conception which they themselves could not apply or live by in their own cultures. Yet, when I talked to them individually, near the conclusion of the semester, I regained

confidence in the course. The goals of multiculturalism and those of the "Facing History" curriculum were demonstrated, as each student related the positive impact of the course.

One of the Japanese students stated that the course opened her eyes to the world. "Now, after having taken this course I am not just a Japanese, I am a global citizen" Her goal, she indicated, is to go back to Japan and attempt to raise consciousness on the way Japanese treat their own minorities. The other Japanese student begun to study, on her own, the role of the Japanese during the last war, specially their role in the Philippines. She had never been exposed to this historical issue before.

The student of Indonesia ,in the beginning referred to the harmony of racial integration in her country. By the end she had researched on her own some of the inter-ethnic and social class problems her country faces. In addition she discovered, in disbelief, that three hundred thousand people had been killed for their political views in 1965. Most of the students felt that the course had increased their tolerance towards others and all were able to relate some aspect of the material to their personal and cultural realities.

At times I felt overwhelmed by my own responsibility. I sensed in my students their loss of innocence about the human condition and about their own perception of their cultures. However, when I expressed this burden to them ,they reassured me of their satisfaction with their own growth.

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The multicultural framework of the course allowed for questioning of the applicability of the content cross-culturally. In addition, American and International students, by sharing in the process of contrasting cultural assumptions, learned about their own cultural conventions and about their own potential for cultural expansion.

Similarly, the international students expressed that through the style and methodology of the course, they had learned new skills which would allow them to better function in United States classrooms. Consequently, reflective skills which stress verbalization, discussion and the assertiveness of individuality can be taught to international students in order to enhance their potential for communication in the United States cultural context.

While the dilemmas posed by the appropriateness of information to other cultures must always be dealt with, content such as the one presented here, can be used universally. However, the teaching of reflective thinking skills cross-culturally must include a framework which will allow for the questioning of the universality of all information that is conveyed. The danger lies in assuming apriori, without questioning, that the content and methodology to be taught is universal.

Similarly, the history of the twentieth century which illustrates in terms of numbers and the efficiency of destruction, the cruelest examples of racial, ethnic and

religious persecution in Western and Non Western countries, points to the need to study such incidents from a universalistic perspective. In addition, the potential threat of a nuclear catastrophe which could destroy all of humanity compels us to universalize the role and values and responsibilities of educators internationally.

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